

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns in a dark green color, framing the entire page.

Mean, Median, and Mode

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Category: IT (2017)

Genre: Fluff, High School, Stozier

Language: English

Characters: Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris

Relationships: Richie Tozier/St Stanley Uris

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-10-09

Updated: 2017-10-09

Packaged: 2020-01-26 01:13:51

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,740

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Stan accidentally takes Richie's math notebook home. He finds some interesting doodles among all the messy scrawling.

Mean, Median, and Mode

Stanley's calm lunch-break studying was interrupted by a whirlwind by the name of Trashmouth Tozier crashing into the library table hard enough to make it rattle and dropping his backpack over all of Stanley's carefully-compiled notes.

"Stan-the-man!" he exclaimed, so loudly that the librarian at her desk looked up to give them a disapproving Look, and several upperclassmen at other tables let out noises of disgust. Richie was infamous around Derry high for his dirty jokes and his mouth that never stopped; he wasn't exactly popular with the library crowd. "What are you doing locked up in here? There are no birds in the library!"

"Richie," Stan ground out through gritted teeth, eyeing in disgust the way Richie's mud-stained backpack was leaching onto his pristine notes. "I'm *busy*."

"Too busy for *me*?! I am *hurt*, Stanley!"

This time, the librarian really did shush him, lips pursed, as she glared over the rim of her cat-framed eyeglasses.

"Sorry, Mrs. Pryce," Richie grinned at her. "I just needed some time with my favorite bird-boy. I miss him so much when his seat in the cafeteria remains empty and cold." He linked his arms around Stanley's neck, hugging him so hard that his glasses pressed into Stan's cheek and Stan's *kippah* was nearly knocked free from his unruly curls.

"*Richie!*" Stan squirmed in his hold, adjusting the cap his mother had knitted before pushing at the other boy. "Please, this is really important. Let me study."

"Hey!" Richie sat back, holding his palms up. "I can appreciate a man at work when I see one. Don't let me stand in your way; I just wanna be with you."

Stanley squinted at him. "You're saying you'll be quiet?" He'd believe

that when he saw it.

Richie saluted, then mimed zipping his lips. Carefully, he extricated his backpack from atop Stan's work and set it on the floor between his feet. Then, from the bag, he produced a notebook and some half-chewed pencils and began doodling.

Stan watched him for a moment to be sure he had no tricks up his sleeve- one could never be too sure with Richie- and then gradually relaxed. Maybe he really *had* gotten lonely at lunch, though how he could be lonely when he was with Eddie and Bill, Stanley didn't understand.

He returned to his notes. *Mean, median, and mode*. He readjusted his yellow highlighter, blue, black and red pens, and two sharpened #2 pencils from where Richie's arrival had knocked them into disarray; they now sat in perfectly straight lines. Good. He was all set to continue studying for tomorrow's math quiz.

Funny; when Richie was around, when he was actually behaving, Stan found that his concentration improved. It was as though the usual tenseness that sat on his shoulders was abated merely by the other boy's presence. Richie was a pill, sure, but he was also safety, familiarity, companionship. Stan hardly noticed as a foot hooked around his ankle, holding him, as Richie often did when they slept side-by-side while camping or during sleepovers. It was as familiar a feeling as petting an old dog's fur or clutching a security blanket to his cheek.

About ten minutes into the study-session, Richie slid something across the table, resting it against Stan's elbow. When Stan glanced at him, his attention was still on his doodles that he shielded with his arm so Stan couldn't see. Richie's long eyelashes brushed his freckled cheeks under his thick glasses, and his wavy black hair fell in unbrushed curlicues on his brow. Stan found himself staring at the way the overhead lights shone in his hair, resisting the urge to brush it off of Richie's face. *Messy*. The boy was so damn messy.

He looked at what Richie had given him: two peanut-butter cookies on a napkin, clearly the kind that could be purchased for twenty-five cents in the school cafeteria. *Stan's favorite*. But Richie liked chocolate

chip... He must have purchased these specifically for Stan, then.

Eating in the library wasn't allowed, and usually Stan was a strict rule-follower... but, well, he *was* hungry, and Richie was strategically sat so as to block the librarian's view of Stan...

He nibbled the cookies as he worked, and when he caught Richie grinning at him, he couldn't help but smile back. When he realized he was doing it, he felt the moment his cheeks flushed pink, and he had to drop his gaze. *What a punk.* (Richie's ankle twitched against his, teasingly.)

He turned back to his work and lost himself in practice problems, tracing triangles neatly against the edge of his ruler and stacking numbers. He was certain he had the hang of it now, but a few more couldn't hurt...

He was so absorbed that he completely tuned out the ringing of the bell, the way the upperclassmen stood and began packing up. That was, until Richie shot to his feet, grabbed Stan's bag, and started putting his things away pell-mell.

"What-" Stan protested, aghast at the way his belongings were being tossed into his bag so carelessly. "Richie, what are you-"

"You're going to be late, old chum!" Richie warned with his best Stuffy Englishman impersonation, zipping Stan's bag and pushing it into his arms. "Tally-ho, my good Stanley, you've *never* been late before and I know you'd so hate to have a tardy on your record! Go, go!"

Glancing at the wall-clock, Stan realized with a jolt that Richie was right; he had less than five minutes to run all the way across campus in time for history. He stared, wide-eyed in gratitude, at Richie, who gave him a push.

"Go!" Richie repeated, laughing, so Stanley took his advice and sprinted as fast as he was able out of the library and onto school grounds.

He made it, just in time.

It wasn't until much later, until the final schoolbell rang, and dinner at the Uris household had been eaten and put away, and Stan's pajamas had been donned and his teeth brushed, that he set about the task of organizing his messy schoolthings. Having things unorganized just made him feel so off-kilter. It was soothing to sharpen all the pencils and cap all the pens, to stack the notebooks in order of color and lay the bookmarks in his books just so.

Hang on... what was this notebook?

He pulled out a scruffy black spiral notebook full of scraggly torn paper-perforations and pencil smudges. He opened it, frowning deeper at the handwriting that was certainly not *Stanley's* neat penmanship... Though it was math notes, and from his own grade's studies, no less.

And what a *mess* those notes were! Scrawly handwriting; incomplete thoughts, running off the end of the page and taking up margins. It was a disaster of discord to Stanley's orderly sensibilities! And wound in, around, and through the actual notes were cartoonish doodles. Stick figures; fully designed characters; actual comic strips full of crass jokes and crude puns... The first time Stan actually laughed out loud at one of the jokes, he paused, surprised. These were *funny*. It was nothing like Bill's own realistic artwork, but it wasn't... *bad*.

He flipped through pages, eagerly looking at how the characters changed and evolved over the months of the schoolyear.

The most recurring stick figures were of four boys; a tall and fair-haired one with pouty lips; a small one who often looked cranky and could sometimes be seen puffing on something- an inhaler?- a bespectacled, dark-haired one with silly, lump-like muscles drawn onto his stick-arms, and one who was always drawn with curly hair and heart-shaped eyes.

Bird-Boy, the curly one was occasionally labelled with arrows. And it appeared that Bird-Boy had a crush on the 'muscular' Dashing Hero, who was often rescuing him from burning buildings or beating up bullies for him. "*My hero!*" Bird-Boy could frequently be seen sighing in the corners, his heart-eyes growing until they eclipsed his entire

face.

It was so juvenile and *silly*, but a little charming, too. Whoever this 'Bird-Boy' really was, 'Dashing Hero' had it bad for him.

Stanley reached the final page (all the ones behind it were empty, just awaiting new maths notes and doodles) and saw the most recent drawing: in the far, right corner, Bird-Boy and Dashing Hero were at last touching lips. The lips in question were shaped like inverse number 3's. He laughed a second time when he saw it, pleased for the hand-drawn lovebirds.

He flicked through the empty pages, hoping for more, but there was nothing, so he at last closed the notebook. He'd have to put it in the lost-and-found tomorrow and hope the artist would come take it back...

But wait! There was a name written on the brown cardboard back-cover of the notebook. Stan moved closer to his lamp and squinted at the faint pencil writing. *"This notebook is the property of Sir King Richard Tozier, esquire. (Bill, keep out!!!)"*

Realization dawned on Stanley, slow and warm as molasses. He returned to the drawings, the stick figures, understanding them with new clarity.

Eddie was the little one with the inhaler, sometimes labelled *'The Tiny One.'*

Bill, with his pouty lips and wide eyes, was the tallest. *'Fearlass Leader.'* (A misspelling, or a joke about asses? With Richie, it could go either way.)

Of course scrawny Richie would depict himself with muscles. Of course. Stanley couldn't help but snicker in fond exasperation. Such a hopeless *nerd*.

But that only left Bird-Boy...

...

... *Ohhhhh.*

Well. Now he knew what Richie had been so busily drawing during this afternoon's library study session.

Slowly, a smile began to spread over his face. It started small, but without his acknowledgement or permission it gradually eclipsed his entire face until he was pink and beaming like a loon. *Richie likes you... he likes you as much as you like him.*

Oh, Trashmouth Tozier. Stanley fell back onto his bed and hugged the notebook to his chest, feeling flutters of the acknowledged crush in his belly. He'd return the notebook tomorrow. He'd look Richie right in the eye and say, *"I think your stuff got mixed up with mine, Dashing Hero."* He imagined the glee he would feel watching Richie sweat it out, wondering what Stan had seen.

... And maybe later, depending on his reaction, he'd see if Richie would also like to catch a movie with him that weekend. Just the two of them.

